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SUBJECT: MEPI UPDATE FOR MOROCCO

REF: Rabat 02509

¶1. Summary: This cable highlights MEPI programs and initiatives in Morocco from October 1 to December 31. Activities included visits by MEPI Washington, the Ambassador's meeting with Global Rights, English ACCESS Microscholarships, capacity building using ICT, Nomadic Craft Caravan, a Family Code baseline study, the Family Law Regional Conference, NCSL's Regional Parliamentary Workshop, NDI's Legislative Research training, IRI's public opinion poll, roundtables on the draft Political Parties Law, and ABA's Women Legal Professionals training. Implementers are partnering with local NGOs at the grassroots level to support numerous programs committed to reform in the four MEPI pillars. End summary.

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MEPI Visitors  
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¶2. MEPI/PI Women's Pillar Program Manager Olivia Ricchi visited Morocco on November 29-December 4 to attend the ABA/Demos family law conference. Ricchi met several NGOs and women representing different segments of society.

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Ambassador Meets Global Rights  
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¶3. In addition to regular contact between the mission and MEPI implementers at the working level, Ambassador Riley has been meeting with resident MEPI implementers to receive briefings and updates on their programs in Morocco.

-- On October 21, Global Rights Resident Director Stephanie Willman-Bordat briefed Ambassador Riley on Global Rights (GR) programs. MEPI funding for the GR program to promote women's legal rights, administered by USAID, will end in February 2006. Willman-Bordat reviewed the progress of the GR programs to date, highlighting the national nature of the project's outreach via seven regional coordinator NGOs. Emphasizing the train-the-trainers aspect of the program, she noted that there are now thousands of trained facilitators and estimated that over a nine-month period, approximately 7,000-10,000 women had been trained in their legal rights, including the new family code. As a result of the meeting, the Ambassador requested that an Embassy team visit a GR project and report on its results (septel).

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Ambassador Kicks Off English Access  
Microscholarship Program  
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¶4. Ambassador Riley visited Meknes and Kenitra to honor the newest recipients of English ACCESS Microscholarships. Thirty five young people from the Meknes area and 42 from Kenitra received certificates of award from the Ambassador, who also spoke with the students and discussed additional educational opportunities provided by the Regional English Language Office (RELO) in Rabat and the Embassy's Public Affairs Section.

¶5. The English ACCESS Microscholarship program provides support to youth from disadvantaged parts of the world to study English and learn about American culture and values. It began in Morocco in 2003 and is now found in more than 40 countries. A total of 573 scholarships have been awarded in Morocco for FY 2005-06 to study at the 10 American Language Centers, AMIDEAST Casablanca and Rabat, and the Ajef de l'Oriental in Oujda.

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Capacity Building Using ICT  
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¶6. Association Tanmia.ma received MEPI funds to develop an Internet portal [www.Tanmia.ma](http://www.Tanmia.ma). The portal's primary mission is to strengthen the capacity of Moroccan Civil Society Organizations using Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools. The portal is designed to be a communication platform that enables government agencies, the private sector, civil society actors and the general public to share information, resources and opinions about socio-economic development initiatives and to develop strategic partnerships.

¶7. Association Tanmia's portal has been very successful. On average nearly 1,500 individuals visit the portal daily; nearly 1,000 individuals subscribe to Tanmia bi-monthly e-newsletter and on average (over 12 months), 320,000 pages are viewed monthly. Tanmia has also created an active calendar, news, employment offers, and forum sections to benefit its 800 on-line registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The NGOs database shows a strong multi-regional participation - less than a quarter these are based in the Rabat/Casablanca corridor.

¶8. Association Tanmia has undertaken training and outreach activities enabling NGOs to access online services. Tanmia held four NGO workshops in collaboration with Kabissa benefiting 67 participants; partnered with other organizations to give training in ICT to 80 teacher supervisors and 40 local NGO employees/managers of girls' dormitory facilities and trained 25 NGOs in train-the-trainers workshop. Tanmia has also launched two community access centers to provide NGOs in remote regions with Internet access.

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Aid to Artisans  
Nomadic Craft Caravan  
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¶9. Since its debut in May 2005, Aid to Artisans (ATA) Nomadic Craft Caravan has offered rural artisans basic training in business and marketing techniques. In December, the caravan participated in the Rabat International Women's Association (RIWA) annual holiday festival where artisans displayed their wares and gained experience selling directly to clients. The artisans' sales totaled \$4,273 at the festival.

¶10. The day before the festival, ATA organized a training class covering basic accounting, sales techniques, and product development. Twelve rural artisans and 10 Peace

Corps volunteers participated in the daylong event. The RIWA event was the fifth and final nomadic caravan event of the year. ATA notes that the artisans have made significant progress since the first event in May. Artisans have been incorporating the trainings and actively creating new and more interesting products in order to gain market share.

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#### Family Code Baseline Study Released

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¶11. World Learning's (WL) Director of Civil Society and Social Change, Preeti Shroff-Mehta, visited Morocco November 12-23 to review the status of the WL project, conduct strategic planning for the sustainability of the project, review the recently released baseline awareness study, and consult on the February 24-25 regional conference being planned by WL on the family code.

¶12. In early November, WL released a baseline study assessing current awareness of the family code in both urban and rural areas. Using questionnaires and focus groups, WL surveyed approximately 1,000 people coming from four different regions. Findings indicate that 88 percent of people have heard of the new code; however, amongst the illiterate, 91 percent of women and 80 percent of men are not aware of the actual changes in the code. Many people considered the new law a "women's reform," and not a new "family code." In February, WL is planning a regional conference that will bring women from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco together to discuss lessons learned during the campaign for a new family code. According to WL, the Moroccan Ministry of Family and Solidarity will also support the conference.

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#### Demos/ABA Family Law Regional Conference

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¶13. Demos Consulting and the American Bar Association (ABA) hosted a regional conference for Arab women on "NGO Capacity Building and Reform of the Family Code," in Casablanca on December 2-3. Women from 13 different Arab countries attended the conference to discuss the status of family laws in their countries and possible advocacy efforts for reforming them. The successful Moroccan experience was highlighted by Moroccan participants. Demos will use the results of the conference in a manual it is producing to advocate for reforming family laws in these countries. Poloff and MEPI Women's Empowerment Pillar Program Manager Olivia Ricchi attended the conference.

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#### MEPI-Funded NCSL Regional Workshop: A Huge Success

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¶14. On November 14-16, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) held a regional workshop for Members of Parliament (MPs) and senior staffers on the topic of "Working with Staff and Using Research in the Legislative Process" (Ref A). The workshop included representatives from the Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian parliaments and featured the participation of three state senators from Alaska, Illinois and Nevada. Six Algerian and two Tunisian MPs traveled to Morocco to attend the conference while a total of 20 MPs from both houses of the Moroccan parliament participated. At the conclusion of the workshop, the Ambassador hosted a reception in honor of the participants.

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#### Legislative Research Training for Parliamentary Interns

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¶15. On November 17, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) collaborated with the NCSL to organize training for NDI parliamentary interns who are working with caucus groups in

the Moroccan Parliament's Chamber of Representatives (lower house). The directors of legislative research at the Nevada and Virginia state legislatures served as expert trainers.

¶16. NDI's Parliamentary Internship program, which is the first of its kind in the parliament, seeks to assist MPs with legislative research, expose students to the work of the parliament and MPs, and promote an image of the institution as accessible to the public. The program now has 12 interns working in conjunction with three of the seven caucuses.

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NDI Consolidates a Core Group of  
Political Party Trainers  
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¶17. From December 12-13, NDI conducted a capstone training event to complete a year-long project. The program provided political party trainers with advanced instruction in conflict resolution, negotiating skills, strategic planning and group facilitation. Thirty four youth and female participants representing 14 political parties took part in the event, all with the consent and support of their parties to form a core group of formal trainers.

¶18. Participants had the opportunity to review skills acquired throughout the year-long program, sharing their recent training experiences in Rabat, Marrakech, Safi, Oujda, and Fes. By critiquing the real-life experiences of their colleagues, participants honed their own training approaches in the hopes of perfecting their skills to execute future trainings for their parties.

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IRI Continues Training,  
Releases Public Opinion Poll  
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¶19. On September 17-18, IRI organized two training sessions for local and regional party members and local elected officials in Agadir. The training seminars assisted local party structures in strategic planning in preparation for the 2007 parliamentary elections, and covered the topics of party structure and organizational planning, voter outreach, and electoral list development.

¶20. Working with a local research firm, IRI conducted a public opinion poll that included 1,500 respondents. The poll provides benchmark political data as well as in-depth look into Moroccan's attitudes towards political reform and governing institutions. The research offers political leaders and decision-makers an opportunity to learn about priorities and opinions of their constituents. During the month of December, IRI shared polling results with political partners and plans to provide a series of training sessions to party officials and local party activists. Training discussions will center on how polling results can be used in electoral and parties strategies. Post will summarize the poll's findings in a separate reporting cable.

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Roundtables on Draft Political Party Law  
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¶21. In October the mission organized two roundtable discussions on the draft political party bill. The discussions addressed a critical shortcoming in the national debate on the party bill by providing a space for stakeholders - civil society, academics, political party representatives, and parliamentarians - to examine the key provisions of the law and debate its consequences and impact on the Moroccan political landscape. Both events were well-attended and well-received by participants.

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Women legal Professionals Training  
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¶22. On October 14, in cooperation with the ABA, two women's rights associations organized a study day to commemorate the royal speech of October 10, 2003 announcing the amendment to the Moroccan Family Code. The day's activities included a round table attended by legal specialists to discuss various rights established by the new law and a question-and-answer session on the new family code for local women.

¶23. The Tetouan Bar Association (TBA) organized a training session for women legal professionals on November 11-12 in Tetouan in northern Morocco. The ABA provided the participants with training on fundamental principles of gender equality. The Tetouan training session is part of a series of training programs planned by the ABA in cooperation with local associations. The ABA's "Women and the Law Program" encourages women legal professionals to be involved in the effort to raise awareness on women's rights and gender equality.

¶24. A detailed description of MEPI programs in Morocco can be found on the Mission unclassified Internet web page at [www.usembassy.ma](http://www.usembassy.ma).

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